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IRAN: "MYKONOS" TRIAL PROVIDES FURTHER EVIDENCE OF IRANIAN POLICY OF UNLAWFUL STATE KILLINGS

Today's verdict from a German court in the trial of five men for the September 1992 killings of three leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran and an interpreter in Berlin yet again indicates a coordinated policy by the Iranian state to kill Iranian dissidents, Amnesty International said today.

The five men -- four Lebanese and one Iranian -- had been charged with carrying out the killing in the Mykonos Restaurant, in Berlin. Four were convicted of the killings, while the fifth -- a Lebanese -- was acquitted. Kazem Darabi, an Iranian said to have organized the killings for the Iranian secret service, and Abbas Rhayel, accused of firing the fatal shots, were given life sentences. The two other Lebanese were given prison sentences of 11 years and five years, three months.

"We welcome the fact that four people have been brought to justice for these killings. However, for years, Iranian dissidents have been dying in circumstances suggesting that they were killed by Iranian Government agents. This trial has shed some further light on the mechanisms by which such killings occur," Amnesty International said.

"It is time for the Iranian authorities to live up to their international obligations to protect the right to life, and to end any such policy of extrajudicial execution."

Amnesty International noted, however, that the case could not yet be considered closed since a German arrest warrant issued in March 1996 for the Iranian Minister of Information and Security (in charge of Iran's secret service), Hojjatoleslam Ali Fallahian -- also allegedly implicated in the killing -- remained outstanding.

The court found that the killings had been ordered by Iran's political leadership through a "Committee for Special Operations", whose members it reportedly said include the Leader of the Islamic Republic, the President, the Minister of Information and Security and other security officials.

The Iranian authorities have consistently denied involvement, and have stated that the trial has been "*turned into a political case*". The Foreign Minister has also reportedly been quoted as saying that the "*Islamic Republic of Iran under no circumstances permits others to dictate to it or damage its reputation or interests*".

BACKGROUND

The existence of such a policy of extrajudicial executions is given further weight by the numerous cases of possible extrajudicial executions of Iranians, both inside and outside the Iran, which have continued to occur in recent years. Of those inside the country, most were either writers or members of religious minorities. For example, Molavi Ahmad Sayyad, a Sunni leader of Baluchi origin, died in unclear circumstances after being arrested at Bandar Abbas airport in January 1997 on his return from the United Arab Emirates. His body was found outside the city five days later. He had previously been arrested in 1990 and apparently detained without trial for five years on account of his religious beliefs and perceived close relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Mohammad Bagher Yusefi (also known as Mohammad Ravanbakhsh), a Protestant Christian pastor, was found dead in September 1996. The Iranian authorities said he had committed suicide, but gave no indication that an independent and impartial investigation had been carried out into his death. Ebrahim Zalzadeh, an editor, "disappeared" in February 1997. His body was found later with stab wounds.

Those killed outside the country included Zahra Rajabi and Abdolali Moradi -- both connected to the National Council of Resistance of Iran -- killed in Turkey in February 1996. In January 1997 an Iranian, Reza Massoumi, was sentenced to 33 years and four months' imprisonment for the killings. He was reported as saying, "*I did not take part in this action of my own will. This is an Iranian secret service plot*". Other victims included Reza Mazlouman, a former Deputy Minister of Education under the Shah, who was killed at his home in France in May 1996 and two Baluchis, Abdolmalek Mollazadeh and Abdolnasser Jamshid Zahi, who were killed in Pakistan in March 1996.

The threat of extrajudicial execution continues to extend to many Iranian nationals abroad, as well as to non-Iranians such as the British writer Salman Rushdie, whose killing had been called for in a *fatwa* (religious edict) in 1989. The Iranian Government has never issued written confirmation that it would not send anyone to kill him. In February 1997, an Iranian foundation raised the bounty payable for the killing of Salman Rushdie; senior members of the clergy made provocative statements; and the Revolutionary Guards published a statement saying that Muslims would not rest until he had been killed. The government failed to condemn or put an end to such threats, indicating official acquiescence in a threat of extrajudicial execution.

Other evidence of state involvement in such killings has been given by statements by Iranian officials. For example, the Minister of Information and Security, Hojjatolesam Ali Fallahian, was reported as saying in a television interview on 30 August 1992: "*We have been able to deal blows to many of the mini-groups outside the country and on the borders... one of the active mini-groups is the Kurdistan Democratic Party... We were able to deal vital blows to their cadres last year... and their activities were reduced.*"

Amnesty International opposes extrajudicial executions as a violation of the right to life, guaranteed by Article 6 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party.

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